

Forget a lifetime of dramatic roles... no-one's taking Leslie seriously any more

IN the original Terminator movie, Arnold Schwarzenegger uttered the immortal words: "I'll be back".

No-one can remember exactly what Lieutenant Frank Drebin said in the 1988 film *The Naked Gun*, but he's back too!

And *The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell Of Fear*, in which Leslie Nielsen returns as arguably one of the dumbest cops ever on screen, is just as wacky as the original.

As producer Bob Weiss explains: "This time we decided to explore the rich underpinnings of these characters' emotions and motivations. Then we figured — ah, the hell with it!"

In the spirit of the film and Leslie's own off-beat sense of humor during our interview, TV WEEK can be about as serious about this as the film's casting directors were when they chose crooner Robert Goulet for their evil villain.

"We cast Bob because we couldn't get Wayne Newton," Weiss quips.

For Leslie, 64, his new-found success from both *Naked Gun* films (the sequel has already grossed more than \$80 million in the U.S.) has come late in his career.

After 40 years of acting — playing largely-serious roles in more than 50 movies and 1500 TV shows — he's delighted that he's now known to a whole young generation of fans only for his comedy work, which began in 1980 with the spoof *Flying High*.

"Now I see my old movies and they're ruined because I'm waiting for the punch line," he says with a chuckle.

"I had a chance at doing a one-man play about the life of Clarence Darrow, a famous lawyer played by Spencer Tracy in

Inherit The Wind and Orson Welles in *The Crime Of Compulsion*. I really wanted to play him, but eventually the producers said they couldn't go through with it because they'd talked with a critic who said, 'Nielsen do Darrow? But he does comedy', and that was the end of it.

"I wanted to know how old the critic was and if he realised that more than 90 per cent of my career was serious drama, but it didn't make any difference."

Leslie admits he is not too disappointed with his reputation.

"For me to end up at this stage in my life and my career actually doing the thing that I suspect I've always wanted to do, which is comedy, must be the biggest roll of the dice in the world."

Three years after his debut in *Naked Gun*, Frank Drebin has returned as a man tormented by the search for his own true identity, answering to no-one but the TV repairman! And, once again, he is still trying desperately to win the heart of the lovely Jane Spencer, played by Priscilla Presley. When the pair bump into each other in the early stages of the sequel, Frank asks Jane: "How are the children?" Jane replies: "Frank, we didn't have any children."

Leslie says: "To have been in *Flying High* and the *Naked Gun* movies — which have all become

SON OF A GUN!

comedy classics — was something not in my wildest dreams.

"I never even dared dream that I'd be called a comedian one day."

Now he can see the funny side of just about everything.





career. "Because of my distinguished appearance, I used to always get those authoritative parts," he says of roles in TV shows such as *The New Breed* and *The Bold Ones*.

"You just knew

"This time we decided to explore the rich underpinnings of these characters' emotions and motivations. Then we figured — ah, the hell with it 9

that if I had a tennis racquet or golf club in my hand, I would play excellent tennis and great golf.

"Frank was the key to freedom for me. Now, if I get up at a golf tournament, everybody expects the worst!"

From Jenny Cooney in Los Angeles

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"I began looking back at some of the things I did 20 years ago and I just laugh as I watch myself and wonder, 'God, was I really that serious?' I think I've always been a kind of closet comedian."

While fans now have a hard time even imagining Leslie as a serious actor, he recalls the opposite problem earlier in his

● Leslie Nielsen and Priscilla Presley go dancing Frank Drebin-style in *The Naked Gun 2½*.

